UNITED
NATIONS

E

Economic and Social
Council

Distr.
GENERAL

E/CN.4/1994/NGO/34
15 February 1994

ENGLISH
Original: FRENCH

COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS
Fiftieth session
Agenda item 7

QUESTION OF THE REALIZATION IN ALL COUNTRIES OF THE ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS CONTAINED IN THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND IN THE INTERNATIONAL COVENANT ON ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS, AND STUDY OF SPECIAL PROBLEMS WHICH THE DEVELOPING COUNTRIES FACE IN THEIR EFFORTS TO ACHIEVE THESE HUMAN RIGHTS, INCLUDING: PROBLEMS RELATED TO THE RIGHT TO ENJOY AN ADEQUATE STANDARD OF LIVING; FOREIGN DEBT, ECONOMIC ADJUSTMENT POLICIES AND THEIR EFFECTS ON THE ENJOYMENT OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND, IN PARTICULAR, ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECLARATION ON THE RIGHT TO DEVELOPMENT

Written statement submitted by the International Federation Terre des Hommes, a non-governmental organization in consultative status (category II)

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement, which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV).

[14 February 1994]

QUESTION OF THE REALIZATION IN ALL COUNTRIES OF ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

1. The International Federation Terre des Hommes welcomes the decision by the United Nations General Assembly to follow the recommendation of the World Conference on Human Rights to appoint a High Commissioner for Human Rights, and hopes that as from this year he will be given the means of fulfilling his mission. It wishes on this occasion to recall its concern at the persistence and aggravation of the situations of imbalance which are impeding the exercise of economic, social and cultural rights in many countries and mainly affect the most disadvantaged strata of society.

2. The violation of economic, social and cultural rights is directly linked to the effects of the structural adjustment policies imposed by the World Bank and IMF, which are jeopardizing world peace and democracy. The examples which follow illustrate this and may be representative of a more general situation. They concern El Salvador and Nicaragua, two countries which have experienced war and are trying in the face of great difficulties to strengthen their democracies, and Colombia and Mexico. The latter two should probably be classified as developing countries in macroeconomic terms and certain indicators even suggest that they have achieved some success in adjustment policies (reduction of the budgetary and trade deficits and inflation). In actual fact, however, these measures have led to a deterioration in the standard of living and an increase in poverty.

3. As regards education:

(a) In El Salvador, in 1980, the proportion of the budget assigned to the sector was 23.1 per cent, but it was only 13.7 per cent in 1992. In 1993, the Council of Ministers further reduced the education budget by 10 per cent; 1/

(b) In Nicaragua, the 1993 budget is far below primary school demand. Furthermore, the taxing of primary education is an obstacle to mandatory free access to education (art. 121 of the Constitution); 2/

(c) In Mexico, 45 per cent of pupils (6.6 million) enrolled in primary schools do not complete this level. In the rural and Indian regions, 80 per cent do not complete primary school. Twenty per cent of the country's primary schools do not provide the six mandatory classes. Seventeen per cent of pupils who complete primary school are not accepted in secondary schools and 25 per cent of pupils entering secondary schools do not complete this level; 3/

(d) In Colombia, the proportion of the social budget in 1991 (health, education, housing) was 10.4 per cent; in 1992 it was 9.45 per cent and in 1993 8.2 per cent, although the Government had promised 22.5 per cent in 1993. 4/

4. As regards health:

(a) In El Salvador, in 1980 the Government allocated 10.6 per cent of the budget to this sector, or 1.8 per cent of GDP, while in 1991 expenditure was only 6.9 per cent of the budget, or 0.90 per cent of GDP. 5/ Forty-seven per cent of the population suffer from critical malnutrition, infant mortality is 53 per 1,000, 6/ 60 per cent of children are undernourished, and 30 per cent suffer from retarded growth; 7/

(b) In Nicaragua, the budget voted in 1992 amounted to US$ 83 million, while the Ministry of Health had put at US$ 150 million the minimum amount needed to cover health requirements. Forty per cent of the population suffer from a substantial protein and calorie deficiency, and 70 per cent of school-age children are undernourished. 8/ According to the World Bank, infant mortality was 72 per 1,000 in 1992;

(c) In Colombia, State expenditure per capita is US$ 8, the lowest of all the countries of Latin America. 9/ Only 19.6 per cent of persons in the middle and upper strata are covered by social security. This figure drops to 6.5 per cent in the most disadvantaged strata. 10/

(d) In Mexico, malnutrition affects 20 per cent of children at birth and infant mortality is 11.9 per 1,000. 11/

5. As regards housing:

(a) In El Salvador, 41 per cent of urban households live in conditions of intolerable overcrowding. 12/ Only 47 per cent have access to drinking water and 58 per cent have no drainage system. In rural regions, 87 per cent of families have no drinking water and 46 per cent have no access to drainage; 13/

(b) In Nicaragua, the housing shortage is estimated at 500,000 dwellings and the trend is increasing. As regards the titles of ownership which should be issued under the 1985 and 1986 Acts, only 2,136 cases out of the 9,373 listed have been resolved. Many of the inhabitants of Managua's suburbs are under constant threat of expulsion; 14/

(c) In Mexico, the housing shortage is estimated at 16 million dwellings (2 million for Mexico City). In 1990, 39 per cent of dwellings had no drinking water and, of the 16 million dwellings registered in the 1990 census, 13 per cent were occupied by two or more families. 15/

6. As regards incomes:

(a) In El Salvador, the minimum family income covers only 60 per cent of basic needs. 16/ There was a 73 per cent decrease in the purchasing power of peasants between 1990 and 1992, and the official surveys for 1990/1991 showed an increase in unemployment and underemployment of 14 per cent compared with the period 1988/1989. The estimates of the local social organizations show that 80 per cent of rural homes are in a situation of extreme poverty and 16 per cent in relative poverty, while official estimates put at 43 per cent the number of rural homes in a situation of extreme poverty and 31.7 per cent in relative poverty;

(b) In Nicaragua, unemployment affects 750,000 persons and is constantly increasing. In addition, there are the specific problems of the structured sectors, for example, schoolteachers or leaders of other sectors dismissed in 1993 for exercising their trade union rights; 17/

(c) In Mexico, the minimum wage, which is what 10 million Mexicans earn has fallen by 22.3 per cent over the past three years. In 1992, it had fallen to just one third of its 1975 value; 92 per cent of the workers listed (including all population strata) received between one and two times the minimum wage, but this did not enable them to meet their basic needs. 18/ Mexico is, however, classified among the countries with a high level of human

development (53rd in the UNDP classification), even though 40.3 million Mexicans are considered to be poor and 17.3 million are in a situation of extreme poverty. Twenty-three per cent of all poor people in Latin America live in Mexico City and, in addition, the proportion of poor people is higher than the average for the region, amounting to 46 per cent; 19/

(d) In Colombia, underemployment has increased in the country's seven main cities from 11.3 per cent in 1985 to an estimated 15.5 per cent in 1992, without counting the "informal" sector which, according to estimates, employs 52 per cent of the active population. 20/ The minimum wage has fallen considerably in the last seven years, with the exception of 1988, when an increase of 0.7 per cent was recorded. It is in the rural regions that the effects of the adjustment are most visible.

7. All these figures tend to prove that poverty is constantly increasing, despite improved macroeconomic indices in certain cases, and show that the social situation is steadily deteriorating and is aggravated by structural adjustment policies; they would be even more significant if population growth and inflation were taken into account. They also tend to prove that, even where GDP growth has been relatively high, for example 2.7 per cent for Mexico in 1992, 4.6 per cent for El Salvador in 1992 21/ and 3.5 per cent for Colombia (only Nicaragua continues to have negative growth), disparities in the redistribution of income are increasing.

8. The situation is even more critical in the rural sector and the Indian regions, as on the Atlantic coast of Nicaragua, where the health and education indices are below the national average. Mexico has just experienced an armed uprising by Indians in the State of Chiapas, one of the poorest and most impoverished regions in the country. This example illustrates the links between failure to respect economic, social and cultural rights, violence and armed conflict. This type of situation calls for an urgent economic response by the international community, so as to avoid further conflicts in the future.

9. Some groups are more affected by the structural adjustment policies. In Nicaragua, 70 per cent of women are in a situation of poverty (54 per cent of the population). These women are heads of families in approximately 50 per cent of the country's households and receive 25 per cent less income than men in the same category. However, women account for 25 per cent of the formal work sector and 45 per cent of the informal sector. 22/ The situation of these women has immediate repercussions on that of their children.

10. In the light of what has been said in this statement, the International Federation Terre des Hommes wishes to recommend that the Commission on Human Rights should:

(a) Call on the World Bank and IMF urgently to assess the adjustment policies, taking into account the disparities in domestic incomes, the increase in poverty and the decline in the social budgets which generate conflict;

(b) Invite the community of nations to find a real solution to the problem of debt and to set up a development fund managed jointly with each country's social institutions. This fund should take into account the needs of the most impoverished sectors, women, children, etc.;

(c) Draw up a list of precise requirements in order to realize economic, social and cultural rights to a minimum extent and to reduce poverty.

Notes

1/ World Bank.

2/ Figures supplied by the Fundación Augusto César Sandino (FACS), Nicaragua.

3/ "La catástrofe silenciosa" (Guevara Niabla, Gilberto).

4/ Sarmiento Carlos, "El manejo agricola en el marco de la apertura" Mimco, CINEP, Bogotá, August 1993.

5/ World Bank.

6/ Ibid.

7/ Ministry of Planning, GAES Group.

8/ Figures supplied by the Ministry of Health.

9/ US$ 40 Nicaragua and Panama, US$ 28 Brazil, Uruguay, US$ 16 to 17 Peru and Ecuador, US$ 65 Jamaica, US$ 114 Bahamas (Oscar Delgado, "La politica social en Colombie: los casos de salud y pensiones", Working paper, Fescol, Bogotá, September 1993).

10/ Sarmiento Libardo, "El paquete social del neoliberalismo". Foro, No. 20, Bogotá, May 1993.

11/ Combate a la pobreza, Vertiente alimentaria. API consultants.

12/ Figures supplied by the Ministry of Planning, 1990.

13/ Health studies, Ministry of Planning.

14/ FACS, Nicaragua.

15/ "La catástrofe silenciosa".

16/ Figures supplied by the Catholic University.

17/ FACS, Nicaragua.

18/ Sara Levera, La Jornada, 8-9 January 1993.

19/ Julio Moguel, La Jordana, 1 September 1993.

20/ Sarmiento Libardo, "El paquete social del neoliberalismo". Foro, No. 20, Bogotá, May 1993.

21/ L'Etat du Monde 1994. La Découverte.

22/ FACS, Nicaragua.